DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 244 302 CS 208 363

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TITLE Being Black in America: The Press Portrayal.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (67th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; *Civil Rights; Comparative Analysis; Content Analysis; Journalism; Mass Media Effects; *Media Research; *Newspapers; *News Reporting
IDENTIFIERS *Youngstown Vindicator

ABSTRACT

Acknowledging inadequacies of press coverage of black Americans during this century, a study examined how a medium sized Ohio daily newspaper covered blacks before, during, and after the civil rights movement. Items concerning blacks in 66 issues of the Youngstown "Vindicator" from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were studied, and the findings compared with those of similar examinations of four major newspapers: the "New York Times," "Atlanta Constitution," "Boston Globe," and "Chicago Tribune." The findings revealed that although the "Vindicator's" coverage during the early 1950s and mid-1960s was by several measures superior to that of the other four newspapers, the "Vindicator" did not make most of the positive changes in coverage the other papers instituted during the 1970s. The volume of coverage the "Vindicator" gave to black Americans, in proportion to the paper's total available news space, plummeted in the 1970s to half what it had been in the 1960s--almost to its 1950s level. This decrease in coverage was not found in the four major papers. In the 1950s, the "Vindicator" devoted a higher proportion of its total news space to coverage of black Americans than did any of the other four papers, but in the 1970s it provided the smallest percentage of coverage. Most of the other four papers studied increased considerably their attention to black problems in the 1970s, but the "Vindicator" continued to devote only about 3% of its coverage of blacks to obstacles facing black Americans in their struggle for equality of opportunity and justice. (HTH)

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Being Black in America: The Press Portrayal

by

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March, 1984

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Abstract of Being Black in America: The Press Portrayal

By Carolyn Martindale

This paper opens with a discussion of the inadequacies of press coverage of black Americans during this century, as voiced by journalists, scholars and other critics. It then examines how the Youngstown Vindicator, a medium-sized Ohio daily newspaper, covered black Americans before, during and after the civil rights revolution. The Vindicator's performance in this area is compared to that of the New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, Boston Globe and Chicago Tribune, all of which were examined in my earlier study of the same subject. The findings reveal that although the Vindicator's coverage during the early 1950s and mid-1960s was by several measures superior to that of the other four newspapers, the Vindicator did not make most of the positive changes in coverage the other papers instituted during the 1970s. The study illustrates some of the ways press coverage of black Americans is changing, and suggests which improvements remain to be made.

Being Black in America: The Press Portrayal

Ben Holman, a black ex-newsman employed by the U.S. Justice Department's Community Relations Service, said in 1970 that he disagreed with most journalists' perception that the function of newspapers is to hold a mirror up to society. What newspapers hold is not a mirror but a microscope, Holman said, which they focus on only a small segment of society. He added that in the process press treatment of minorities suffers from what lens buffs describe as "spherical abberation, or fuzziness around the edges."[1]

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some of the ways this "fuzziness around the edges" has been manifested in press coverage of black Americans, and to try to trace what changes have occurred in press treatment of black Americans in the years since the civil rights movement. The paper reports the findings of an empirical study of a middle-sized Ohio metropolitan newspaper's coverage of black Americans between 1950 and 1980, and compares these results with those of my earlier study of four major newspapers' treatment of news about blacks during the same period.

The press's performance during the first 70 years of this century in portraying American blacks and covering their concerns has not been commendable. Many black citizens, journalists and

communications scholars interested in this topic have noted numerous deficiencies in newspaper coverage of blacks. They have felt that black Americans have been largely invisible in the white press, that newspapers have emphasized stereotypical portrayals of blacks, have failed to cover the everyday life activities of the black community and have largely ignored the problems facing black citizens in their struggle to achieve equality of opportunity and justice in America.

These conclusions were reported in the findings of several researchers who studied press coverage of black Americans during the earlier years of the century. These scholars include George Simpson, who studied news about blacks in the Philadelphia press between 1908 and 1932[2]; Noel Gist, who analyzed the portrayal of blacks in 17 major newspapers in the late 1920s[3]; Johnson, Sears and McConahay, who studied coverage of blacks in Los Angeles newspapers from the late 1800s to 1968[4]; a few doctoral candidates who analyzed individual newspapers' treatment of news about blacks[5]; and several other scholars whose analysis of various aspects of press treatment of blacks have been reported in Journalism Quarterly and other journals.[6]

Journalists themselves began to perceive these deficiencies in coverage in the second half of the 1960s, when the civil rights movement was in full swing and urban ghettos across the nation were erupting in violence. In articles in professional periodicals and at conferences on the mass media and race relations, journalists concerned about the media's role in the nation's racial crisis began discussing the inadequacies of past

newspaper coverage of black Americans. Their conclusions echoed those reached by the scholars who had studied the topic, and included the additional charge that the media tended to focus on the conflict aspects of protest activities while providing scant explanation of the causes underlying the protests.[7] The Kerner Commission, in its 1968 report on the causes of the urban riots, advanced these same criticisms in its section on the mass media.[8]

As the Kerner Commission, journalists and scholars pointed out, the coverage deficiencies not only represented a failure by journalists to meet their own profession's standards of accuracy, objectivity and realistically reflecting society for their readers. The inadequacies also cast the press in a negative role in race relations in America. For instance, by ignoring news of the black community, the press has contributed to white ignorance concerning blacks and failed to help white readers to perceive blacks as a normal part of American society, the Kerner Commission stated.[9] Other critics pointed out that newspapers' focus on news of the black criminal, entertainer and athlete has reinforced stereotypes of blacks.[10] The white press's ignoring of the severe societal obstacles preventing blacks from enjoying full equality in America has contributed to whites' ignorance of the reality of black Americans' lives, some critics state.[11] Others believe that the papers' focus on the violence accompanying the civil rights revolution coupled with their ignoring of the revolution's causes hampered whites from understanding the urgency and legitimacy of blacks' demands and helped to deepen white readers' fear of blacks.[12]

Has the situation changed since 1970? Has the press begun to implement some of the coverage improvement suggestions advanced during the late 1960s? Did the civil rights movement and the urban riots sensitize the white press sufficiently that it has begun to portray black Americans more accurately, and to explore black concerns? Does the white newspaper reader obtain a more realistic picture now than he did in the 1950s, or even in the 1960s, of what it's like to be black in America? Or have newspaper managements decided that the nation's racial situation no longer requires press attention, now that the struggle for black equality seldom involves violence?

According to minority journalists and others whose views have been reported in professional journalism periodicals since 1970, although the press has made some progress in its coverage of black Americans, many more improvements remain to be made. The everyday life activities of the black community and the concerns of black citizens continue to go under-reported, the journalists say, while newspapers continue to focus on stereotypical coverage of blacks and on the conflict aspects of racial protest.[13] The black journalists state that most newspaper executives now have lost any sense of urgency in covering race relations or in redressing the injustices of the past by hiring more minority journalists.[14]

While the perceptions of these critics offer some insights into the general nature of press coverage of black Americans since 1970, the research of communications scholars so far provides little empirical evidence for assessing press per-

formance in this area. Most scholarly studies of media portrayal of blacks reported since 1970 have focused on coverage by news magazines and television, and although these have revealed more, and more even-handed, media coverage of blacks, they have also repeated the familiar criticisms of inadequate, unrepresentative and unfavorable treatment of news about black Americans.[15] Similar conclusions were reached by Anju Chaudhary in a study of newspaper portrayal of black officials in 19 cities in the 1970s.[16]

An attempt to provide additional empirical evidence for analyzing recent press coverage of black Americans was the purpose of a study I conducted of such coverage by the Youngstown, Ohio Vindicator, a daily newspaper in northeastern Ohio with a circulation of 100,500. The study analyzed the Vindicator's coverage of black Americans during selected years between 1950 and 1980, and the results were compared to a similar study I had earlier conducted of coverage of blacks by four major Americans newspapers during the same time period. These papers were the New York Times, the Atlanta Constitution, the Boston Globe and the Chicago Tribune.

Although the focus of the research project was to ascertain what improvements in the Vindicator's coverage of black Americans had been made in the 1970s, and which coverage deficiencies remained, the newspaper's coverage in the early 1950s and the mid-1960s also was sampled, for several reasons. One of these was to provide a basis for comparing the changes occurring in the coverage over the three periods, and another was to seek empir-

ical evidence of the kinds of earlier coverage inadequacies discussed by communications scholars, journalists themselves, and the Kerner Commission.

Questions to be answered by the research were:

1. How much of the coverage portrayed the everyday life of black citizens, and of blacks as a normal part of American society?

2. How much of the coverage presented stereotypical images of blacks?

3. How much of the coverage explored problems facing blacks?

4. In its coverage of the confrontational events of the civil rights struggle of the 1960s, how much explanation did the Vindicator provide of the causes of the events?

5. Did the newspaper express, it its editorials and in news treatment, indifference and antipathy toward blacks, as the Kerner Commission charged was common?

6. How did the Vindicator's coverage in these areas change over the three time periods studied?

7. How did the paper's performance in these areas compare to that of the other four newspapers studied?

Design of the Study

The Vindicator was selected for study for several reasons. One was its status as a medium-sized metropolitan daily similar to many other such papers across the country. Another was that the four papers previously studied were well-known, resource-rich papers whose approach to coverage of black Americans during the

periods studied may have been atypical of most American dailies; it was thought a study of a more average newspaper might provide an interesting comparison in results.

Items concerning black Americans in 66 issues of the Vindicator were studied. The issues examined were drawn randomly from a stratified sample of months, weeks of the month and days of the week during selected years of the period studied.

The first portion of coverage sampled was taken from the four years from 1950 and 1953, to obtain a picture of the paper's coverage of blacks before the civil rights movement gained momentum and the resulting direct action tactics attracted more press attention to black activities than had previously occurred. The next sample issues were from the six years from 1963 through 1968, at the height of the civil rights movement. The final group of sample issues was drawn from the years 1972 through 1980, after the confrontational activities of the civil rights movement had ceased and papers had had time to begin implementing the coverage improvement strategies suggested in the 1960s.

The sample included three issues a year for the four-year period studied in the 1950s, four issues a year for the six years examined in the 1960s, and six issues a year for the five years from the 1970s, for a total sample of 66 issues.

An instrument for coding the coverage into categories was devised, and included 16 subcategories that were grouped into four main categories.

Each sample issue was scanned and all pertinent items noted, measured and assigned to the appropriate subcategory on the basis

of the topic of the item. The recording unit was any newspaper item--news or feature story, editorial or opinion column, letter to the editor, photo or cartoon--that concerned American blacks or events involving or directly affecting blacks. Items in the sports sections of the papers were not included, because the focus of the study was general news coverage of blacks. A total of 233 items was coded.

The first of the four main categories into which the items were coded was stereotypic coverge, and included the subcategories of antisocial actions (crimes committed by blacks) and entertainment figures. The second main category was everyday life, and this included subcategories of items that showed blacks as part of the normal life of the community. These were community activities, individual achievements, political activities, black officeholders, disasters and interracial violence.

The third main category, civil rights, included subcategories of coverage concerned with the black struggle for equality, such as black protests, riots, white resistance to integration, civil rights gains, and other civil rights-related news. The fourth category was minority life, and included the subcategories of black problems and housing programs.

An estimate of the Vindicator's total available news space was made on the basis of a hand measurement of the news hole in an average-sized issue from each of the three time periods.

In order to check coding reliability, two persons not involved in the study each independently coded four sample issues including a total of at least 22 items. Intercoder reliability

was .86.

Findings

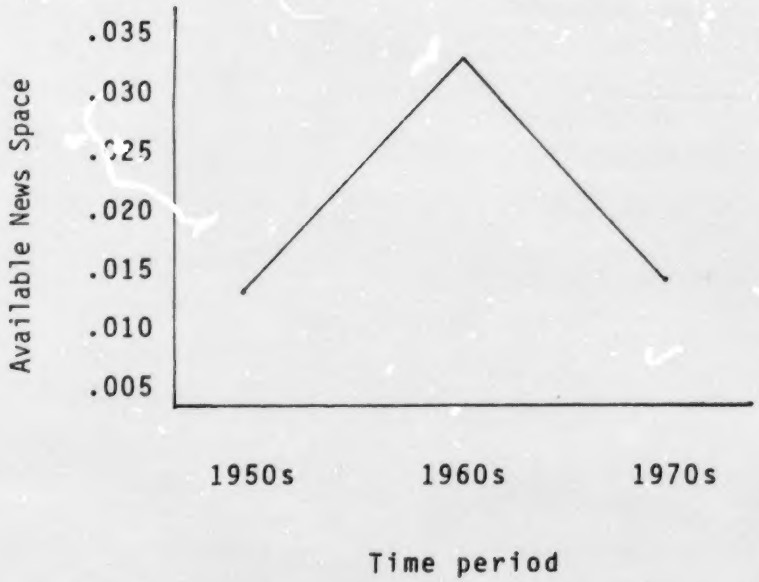
The most outstanding aspect of the amount of coverage the Vindicator gave to black Americans was the way the volume of coverage, in proportion to the paper's total available news space, plummeted in the 1970s. As Figure 1 indicates, the amount of coverage in relation to the paper's news hole fell during the 1970s to half what it had been in the 1960s, and descended almost to its 1950s level.

This kind of decline in the 1970s had in one sense been expected, because the demonstrations and protests that commanded extensive news coverage in the 1960s also had declined. However, this type of sharp decrease was not found in the earlier study of coverage of blacks in four major newspapers. In fact, in two of those newspapers the amount of coverage in relation to news hole increased in the 1970s from its 1960s level, and in the other two papers it decreased only slightly, and was in the 1970s more than double what it had been in the 1950s.

In the 1950s the Vindicator devoted a higher proportion of its total news space to coverage of black Americans than did any of the other four papers analyzed, and in the 1960s provided a higher proportion of such coverage than all but one of the papers, but in the 1970s it provided the smallest percentage of coverage of blacks of any of the papers.

The Vindicator's achievement in providing the highest proportion of coverage of news about blacks in the 1950s among

Fig. 1 Estimated percentage of news hole devoted to coverage of blacks during three time periods



all the papers analyzed is even more noteworthy in view of the fact that during this period the Vindicator was the only one of the five papers studied that did not routinely identify blacks as Negroes in news stories. The result of this enlightened attitude--a long-standing one at the Vindicator--was that the coder was not able to include in the tally of the Vindicator's coverage many news items that probably were about blacks. In the other papers coded from this period, many crime and auto accident stories involving blacks, and some obituaries and community news items, were picked up by the coder because the subjects of the stories were designated as Negro. Since this was not the case in the Vindicator, this paper's proportion of news about black crime and, to some extent, everyday life activities was correspondingly lower, yet the paper nonetheless devoted a higher proportion of its news space to coverage of blacks in this period than did the other four papers.

The Vindicator devoted little space to news about black crime or other stereotypical images of blacks in any of the three time periods, as Table 1 indicates. The paper's coverage of stereotypical news about blacks was among the lowest of any of the newspapers studied in all three time periods.

Another unusual aspect of the Vindicator's coverage of blacks during the 1950s was that the paper frequently carried a lengthy column called "Local Colored News Notes," which included social and organizational news, and items about black churches and funerals. This column was found in seven of the first eight issues coded in the 1950s.

TABLE 1

MEAN NUMBER OF COLUMN INCHES PER ISSUE OF COVERAGE OF BLACK AMERICANS BY SUBCATEGORIES OF COVERAGE DURING THREE TIME PERIODS

Coverage	Time Period		
	1950s	1960s	1970s
Stereotypic			
Antisocial actions		2.36 5%	1.52 5%
Entertainment figures	1.04 6%	.61 1%	2.72 10%
Subtotal	1.04 6%	2.97 6%	4.24 15%
Everyday Life			
Community activities	9.24 54%	7.14 16%	10.70 38%
Individual achievements	1.11 6%	4.78 10%	3.59 13%
Political activities	.20 1%	.93 2%	2.00 7%
Local officeholders at work			.45 2%
Disasters	2.05 12%	.26 1%	.47 2%
Interracial violence		.14	.14
Subtotal	12.60 73%	13.25 29%	17.35 62%

TABLE 1--continued

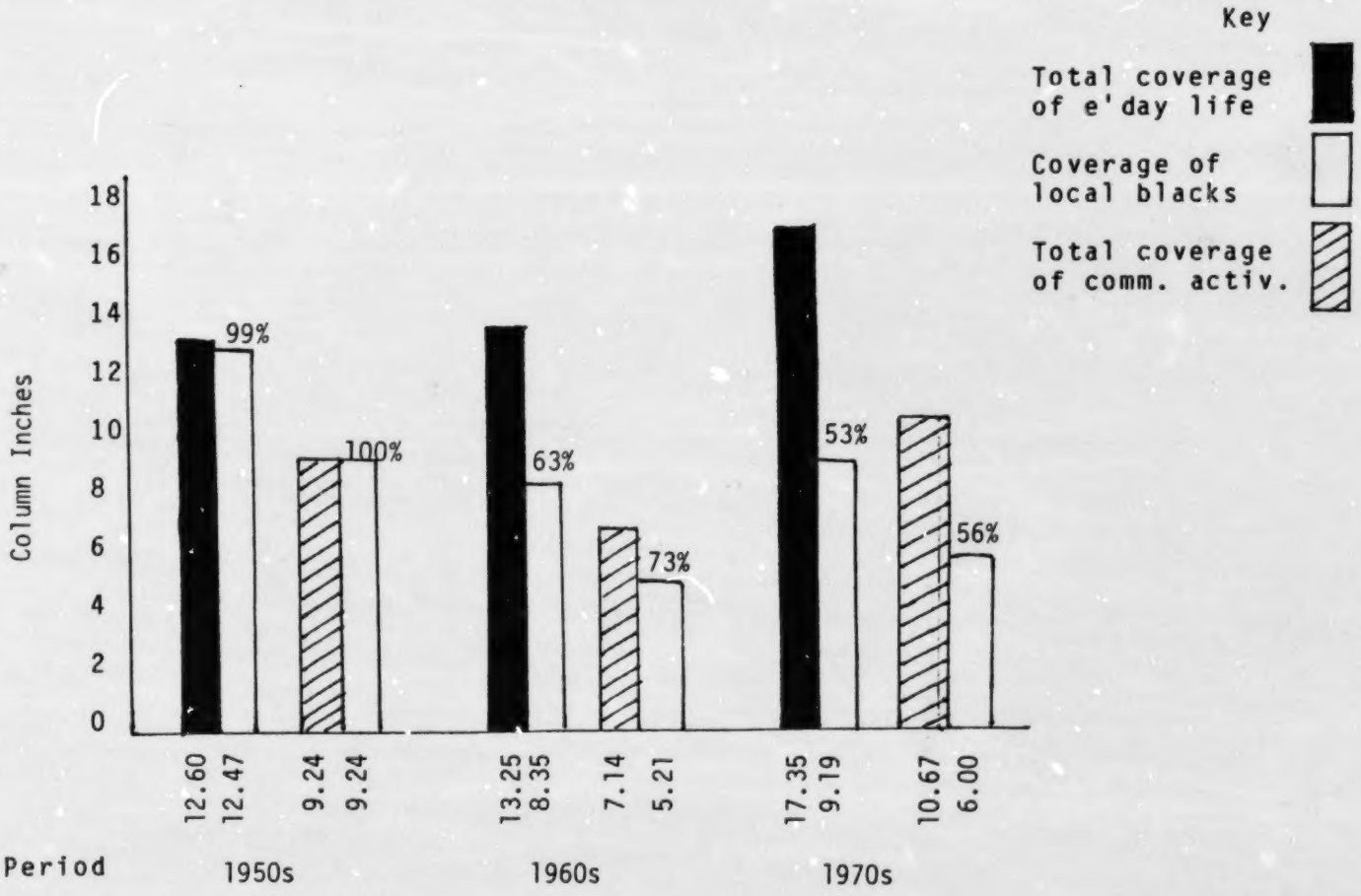
Coverage	Time Period		
	1950s	1960s	1970s
Civil Rights-Related			
Protest		5.01 11%	.21 1%
Riot/community tense		1.02 2%	.79 3%
White resistance to integration		4.14 9%	.35 1%
Civil rights gains	.50 3%	.88 2%	.14
Civil rights-related activities	1.89 11%	11.68 26%	4.03 15%
White leaders call for integration		5.13 11%	
Subtotal	2.39 14%	27.86 61%	5.52 20%
Minority Life			
Problems		1.47 3%	.70 3%
Housing programs	1.18 7%	.21 1%	
Subtotal	1.18 7%	1.68 4%	.70 3%
Total	17.21 100%	45.76 100%	27.81 100%

At first one might suspect that a column of this type represented a segregationist and patronizing attitude of the part of the Vindicator's management. However, the paper's executives say the column was run at the request of the local black community, and it did represent an unusual phenomenon for this period in a paper serving a city with a population that was only 7% black. The only similar column found in the other papers studied was in the 1950s issues of the Atlanta Constitution, when Atlanta had a population that was 37% black, and the column appeared in the Constitution issues coded much less frequently than the same type of column appeared in the Vindicator on the same sample dates. A total of 36% of the Vindicator's coverage of blacks in the 1950s was accounted for by the community activities coverage presented in this column.

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of the Vindicator's coverage of blacks during all three periods was its heavy emphasis on news portraying blacks as part of the everyday life of the community. Throughout the three periods studied the Vindicator devoted a substantial percentage of its coverage of blacks to items in the everyday life category, and in all three periods this percentage was much higher than that provided by the other four papers studied.

In addition, some of the coverage itself suggests that such presentation resulted from a deliberate policy of the Vindicator's management to present blacks as part of the city's life. As Figure 2 indicates, a very large percentage of the paper's coverage in the everyday life category, and especially in the

Fig. 2 Mean number of column inches per issue of coverage of local blacks as percentage of total everyday life and community activities coverage during three time periods



community activities subcategory, concerned the activities of local blacks.

As will be discussed in more detail later, a large proportion of the coverage of local community activities was comprised by photos showing blacks. Many of these were group photos of a positive nature, such as pictures of vocational school nursing aide graduates or local university ROTC cadets being commissioned, or of children enjoying a Rotary-sponsored Christmas party or watching an Armistice Day parade.

The most noticeable evidence of the Vindicator management's attempts to include pictorial presentation of blacks as part of the city's life was found in photo layouts of religion-related events. For example, in 1953 the paper ran eight multi-column photos of women and girls leaving local churches after Easter services, with a headline saying "These Were Among Youngstown's Grandest Ladies in Easter Parade." Of the eight photos, two showed black women and children leaving local Baptist churches, indicating an unusually egalitarian attitude for a white newspaper management in the early 1950s. (A Vindicator executive pointed out that the photos also included Eastern Orthodox as well as Protestant and Catholic churches, because the paper's management consistently attempted to include portrayal of the range of ethnic and racial components of the city's population.)

In 1974 an extensive photo layout on the installation of a local man as a bishop of the Catholic church included, in the group scenes, a black cardinal and several black priests, and a three-page pre-Christmas church page layout in 1980 included two

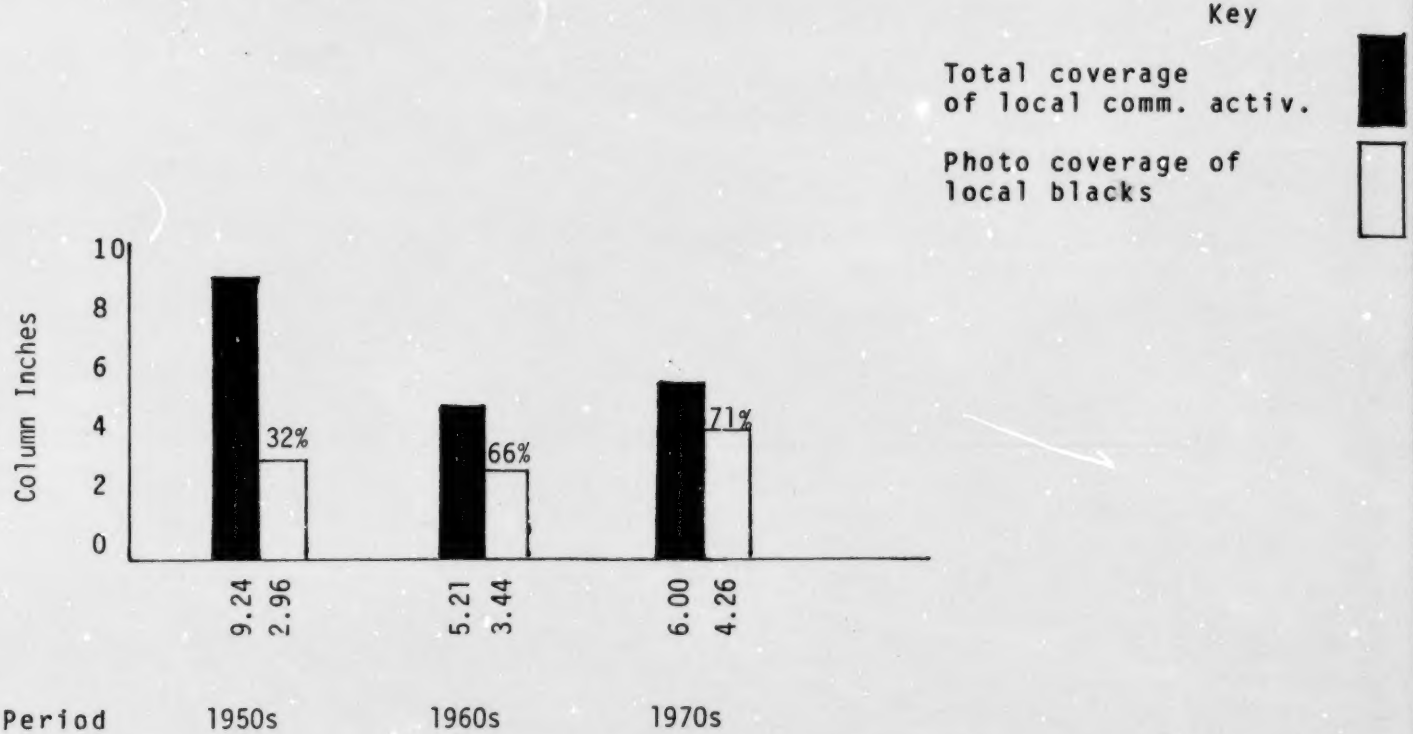
photos of a black choir and a black nativity scene at local churches.

Besides emphasizing local black community activities, the paper also presented considerable coverage of individual achievements, especially of local scholarship and awards winners, and often ran stories concerning black professional persons. In 1974 a retirement dinner honoring a local black labor leader was given extensive coverage, with a long story and several multi-column photos. By the early 1960s the Vindicator's society pages were integrated, as its news, church and obituary pages had been earlier.

Thus the Vindicator not only did an outstanding job of presenting blacks as part of the normal life of American society during all three periods, but also preserted an extensive and positive portrayal of blacks in the local community. This kind of coverage was very different from that found in the other four newspapers studied, which tended either to ignore everyday life activities involving blacks or to focus heavily on black crime until the 1970s issues studied, when the everyday life coverage became much more extensive and representative.

Less encouraging is the finding, shown in Figure 3, that throughout the three time periods an increasing percentage of the coverage of local community activities of blacks was provided by stand-alone photos, unaccompanied by a story. By the 1970s, 71% of the Vindicator's considerable coverage of local blacks was actually comprised by pictures rather than information. In all of the 233 items coded, no feature on a non-prominent local black

Fig. 3 Mean number of column inches per issue of photo coverage of local blacks as percentage of total local community activities coverage during three time periods



person interesting because of a hobby or other activity was found; in fact, the only story of this type found was a 1968 wire service feature on a black man who played Santa Claus in a Harlem department store. No stories on black culture or black contributions to the city or nation were found.

The study revealed that the Vindicator provided no coverage of black problems in the 1950s issues coded, and devoted only 3% of its coverage of blacks in the 1960s issues coded to problems facing black citizens. This was not dissimilar to the performances of the four newspapers studied earlier.

Most news organizations, when covering a major running story such as the civil rights movement was in the 1960s, make a practice of providing sidebar stories which explain the background and history of the current situation. It seemed logical to expect that during the 1960s the Vindicator might have run some wire service stories, or articles written by its own reporters, providing readers with information about the conditions of black life which the civil rights revolution was aimed at correcting. But only a small percentage of coverage in the issues coded presented such information.

This type of press inattention to the conditions underlying the civil rights revolution was a major concern of the Kerner Commission, and also was scored by National Urban League director Whitney Young, who said during the 1960s that "The press has failed to show that the Negro's grievances are real. To read the newspapers, you might think the Negro was reacting to some mild inconvenience."[17]

Most of the other four papers studied considerably increased their attention to black problems in the 1970s issues coded, but this was not the case with the Vindicator, which continued to devote only 3% of its coverage of blacks to obstacles facing blacks in their struggle for equality of opportunity and justice.

Even less encouraging was the finding that not one of the problem stories carried by the Vindicator, in the issues coded, concerned problems of local blacks. All the other four newspapers studied provided some coverage of the concerns of local black citizens, especially during the 1960s and to a smaller extent in the 1970s. But the Vindicator did not, in the issues coded, devote any of its own resources to exploring the situation of local blacks. All the problem stories run concerned problems of blacks nationwide, and were provided by syndicated columnists or news services.

In a related area--that of coverage of causes of black protest--only 6% of the Vindicator's coverage of black protest activities in the 1960s provided readers with an explanation of the causes underlying the protests, and this same inattention to the causes of black protest in the 1960s also was found in the other four newspapers studied. In some ways the Vindicator had less opportunity than did the other, richer papers to cover the causes of black protest, because it didn't send its own reporters to cover out-of-town conflicts as the other papers occasionally did, but instead relied on wire service--usually AP--reports of the events.

But Vindicator readers were not well served by the way the

wire service stories were edited. On numerous occasions the whole civil rights struggle in the South was presented in a single round-up story which seemed comprised of the first two paragraphs of five different stories. A typical example began with Martin Luther King presenting a list of demands to city officials in Birmingham, in the third papragraph reported James Meredith's applying to Ole Miss's law school, and in the next four paragraphs covered sit-ins and protests in cities in South Carolina, Alabama and Louisiana. In the process, the reasons for the blacks' demands and efforts were pared down to a single sentence or omitted altogether. A typical seven-inch story included half an inch of explanation of causes.

In addition, the wires service reports betrayed some perhaps unconscious bias against blacks who pressed for their rights. For example, an AP story of James Meredith's father's death in 1965 repeated an earlier AP statement that "Meredith's arrival on (the Old Miss) campus resulted in an all-night riot in which two men were killed and hundreds hurt." The implication was that the violence was Meredith's fault.

This kind of ignoring of the causes of black protest, combined with a failure to provide much coverage of black problems, helps account for the Kerner Commission's charge that the press had failed to inform readers of the causes of the civil rights revolution and the ghetto riots.[18] It also helps explain why, at the time of the riots, white readers were asking in bewilderment, "But what do Negroes <u>want</u>?"

In stories about local black protests, the <u>Vindicator</u>

acquitted itself much better than it did in coverage of distant conflicts. Fifty-seven percent of the paper's 1970s coverage of causes and 41% of the 1960s causes coverage was contributed by the paper's coverage of local black organizations protesting the Republican party's failure to appoint a black lawyer to a city judgeship, and police abuse of the local black community. In these two stories from one-fourth to one-half of each story was devoted to an explanation, in the black group's own words, of the reasons for their protests. This was a much higher percentage of causes coverage found in any protest story in the other four newspapers analyzed.

If the Vindicator's readers were not well informed of the causes of the civil rights struggle and the reasons for non-local black protest activities in the 1960s, they were not further enlighted by the preponderance of conservative syndicated columnists run by the paper in the 1960s and early 1970s. During this period five lengthy columns by David Lawrence, Victor Riesel and Evans and Novak decried the measures advocated by proponents of racial change, without ever exploring or even mentioning the injustices the measures were designed to correct. For example, these columnists opposed proposed open housing legislation, affirmative action programs, mixing school children to achieve racial balance, civil rights marches on city streets and highways, and civil rights groups' opposion to the Viet Nam war. Not until the mid-1970s, when the paper began carrying columns by Carl Rowan and William Raspberry, were black perspectives made available to readers.

One of the most unexpected findings of the study was the Vindicator's editorial inattention to matters concerning blacks in the 1970s issues coded. The only editorial found during this period stated that blacks were no longer as sensitive as they had been in the 1960s to derogatory humorous racial images and language in the entertainment media. On the same sample dates in the 1970s the other four newspapers ran an average of seven editorials each about issues affecting black citizens.

Of the seven Vindicator editorials coded in the study, five were run during the 1960s, and two of these concerned local blacks and indicated once again the paper's management's positive attitude toward them. One editorial commended the ability of a local man who assumed a position with the city school board, and another welcomed AME Zion bishops to a convention in the city, and praised their expertise.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the study was the dichotomy suggested by the Vindicator's coverage of blacks. On the one hand, the coverage provided many indications of the Vindicator management's positive attitude toward local blacks, its avoidance of stereotypical coverage, and its efforts to include blacks in its portrayal of the city's life. But the coverage also suggested the paper made little effort to portray the problems of local blacks, to explore their contribution to the city, and to provide features on non-prominent local blacks who were in some way interesting. In addition, the paper management's positive approach to coverage of local blacks is contrasted with a continued ignoring of problems of blacks in the

larger society, and a seeming unconcern with the fact that racial equality and justice have by no means been acheived in this country--a situtions which the other four newspapers studied frequently brought to their readers' attention in their 1970s editorials.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that this study's findings indicate that, by many standards, the Vindicator exhibited as early as the 1950s an extremely positive approach to coverage of black Americans, particularly local black citizens. Unlike the other four newspapers studied, during the 1950s and 1960s the Vindicator heavily emphasized coverage of blacks as part of the ordinary life of the community, avoided stereotypical images and racial designations, presented a positive picture of local blacks, did not exhibit a patronizing attitude toward blacks, and covered the causes of local protest thoroughly. It also devoted a larger percentage of its news hole to coverage of blacks than most of the other papers did, in the first two periods studied.

On the other hand, the Vindicator did not--or was not able to--provide much explanation of the causes of social protest in the 1960s, nor did it devote much attention, in the issues coded, to the problems of black Americans, especially the local black community.

Ironically, although the Vindicator's performance in coverage of black Americans during the first two time periods studied was by most measures superior to that of the other four

newspapers studied, during the 1970s the newspaper failed to make the coverage improvements the other papers did. The Vindicator did not, in the 1970s issues coded, continue to provide a higher proportion of coverage of black Americans, did not further explore the problems facing them, and did not continue to devote editorial attention to issues concerning them.

It almost seemed as though the Vindicator's management, while making an effort to cover local blacks in a positive and representative manner, was uninterested in presenting readers with information about the situation of blacks in the larger society and the obstacles still barring them from equality. Even during the late 1970s the paper still was not providing what the Kerner Commission urged the press should offer its readers--"a feeling for the difficulties and frustrations of being a Negro in the United States."[19]

Clearly, great variety exists among the five newspapers examined in this and the previous study, both in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of their portrayal of black Americans and in terms of how that portrayal has changed over the past several decades. It is equally obvious that, despite the introduction of significant positive changes, the newspapers have difficulty in conveying an accurate image--without "fuzziness around the edges"--of the experience of being black in America. Many coverage improvements have already been instituted; many more need to be made.

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